

To: The Tucson Bond Project Advisory Committee

From: Helen Erickson, MLA

Re: Renovation of the TCC Eckbo-designed Plaza

Date: February 27, 2015

In response to comments made during recent discussions by both Tucson and Pima County bond advisory committee members, I would like to draw your attention to the following considerations.

The Eckbo-designed landscape is one of only four publically-owned green spaces in Tucson's downtown (the others are the library plaza, Presidio Park and Armory Park). These open areas are precious resources for a city in the process of downtown redevelopment.

The TCC Plaza is unique in its historic pedigree, and its water sequence is an uncontested masterpiece. But it should not be ignored that the landscape as a whole is a valuable downtown park. Thus the probable economic impact of its restoration must be viewed from this perspective as well.

Green space has a positive impact on adjacent property values. The National Association of Realtors and the National Homebuilders Association have found that residential properties realize a 10 to 20% gain in value the closer they are located to green space. The presence of a restored plaza landscape will have a positive economic impact on the housing units now being constructed in Tucson's downtown area.

Green space reduces the urban heat island effect. According to the California Energy Commission: "Planting the correct trees, shrubs, vines and groundcover can reduce summer cooling costs by 20 to 40 percent." Trees have been the most requested city amenity in every known Tucson City Plan. When restored, the landscape will contribute an urban forest to Tucson.

Contact with nature increases worker productivity. Psychologists have found that access to plants and green spaces provides a sense of rest and allows workers to be more productive.

Green space encourages business growth. Small businesses choosing a new business location rank the amount of open space and proximity to parks as the number-one priority in site selection.

Well-kept parks enhance business districts. Greening of business districts increases community pride and positive perception of an area, drawing customers to adjacent businesses.

Green space reduces crime. Frances Kuo of UCLA conducted a study of 28 identical high-rise public housing projects¹ She found that people living near green spaces

- Boasted a stronger sense of community
- Coped better with everyday stress and hardship
- Were less aggressive and less violent
- Performed better on test of concentration
- Managed problems more effectively

Green space itself boosts tourism. Employment opportunities are associated with the creation and long-term maintenance of urban open space, as well as tourism dollars from visitors to parks, gardens and civic areas. According to Richard Florida, author of *Rise of the Creative Class*, "Place is becoming the central organizing unity of our economy and society."

Tucson's Modernist heritage is a valuable tourism resource. Tucson is well positioned to take advantage of cultural tourism for many reasons, but a major opportunity is the rise of interest in Modernism. Tucson's architectural heritage is underscored by the presence of the Eckbo-designed plaza. Last year over 3,000 people attended Tucson's Modernism Week, and the expectation is that this figure will double in the near future. Other cities with Modernist resources have discovered the value of Modernist heritage tourism. A recent *New York Times* article evaluates the economic impact of a Modernism Week in Palm Springs, CA.² Bear in mind that Tucson had its share of celebrity residents during this same period and that our architectural heritage is undoubtedly comparable. And Palm Springs has no landscape comparable to our Eckbo-designed plaza.

¹ University of Southern California: *Teen and Adult Perceptions of Urban Green Space Los Angeles*;

<http://www.colorado.edu/journals/cye/>

² <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/26/us/palm-springs-modern-architecture-tours.html>